

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 206456

FOR NETHERCUT FROM CHAPMAN

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, NATO

SUBJECT: NATO FAR EAST EXPERTS MEETING - THAILAND

DEVELOPMENTS

FOLLOWING SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO CINCPAC SAIGON PHNOM PENH

VIENTIANE DIA UDORN CHIANG MAI SONGKHLA FROM BANGKOK

OCT 16

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 16204

1. SUMMARY: INITIAL SHOCK AT THE SUDDEN RESIGNATION OF PRIME MINISTER THANOM KITTIKACHORN AND AT THE REPORTS OF CLANDESTINE DEPARTURE OF THANOM, HIS SON NARONG, AND STRONG-MAN PRAPHAT CHARUSATHIEN FROM THE COUNTRY HAS GIVEN WAY TO STUDENT AND POPULAR EUPHORIA AT THE STUDENTS' SUDDENT POLITICAL SUCCESS AND RELIEF THAT CIVIL ORDER IS BEING RESTORED TO BANGKOK. A CAUTIOUS WAIT-AND-SEE ATTITUDE PREVAILS REGARDING THE NEWLY APPOINTED GOVERNMENT OF SANYA THAMMASAK, WHICH IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED TO HAVE BUT A CARETAKER MANDATE TO RULE UNTIL A CONSTITUTION CAN BE PROMULGATED AND A CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT CAN BE ELECTED.

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REGARDING THE PROSPECTS OF SANYA'S GOVERNMENT TO SURVIVE,

MOST THAI CONTACTED FEEL THAT HE AND HIS COLLEAGUES WILL HAVE AT LEAST SEVERAL MONTHS TO PROVE THEMSELVES; BUT FEW THAI WOULD VENTURE AN OPINION REGARDING SANYA'S (OR FOR THAT MATTER ANY CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT'S) PROSPECTS OVER A LONGER PERIOD. THERE IS A GENERAL RECOGNITION THAT THE ROYAL THAI ARMY COULD, IF IT SO CHOSE, FATALLY UNDERMINE THE STABILITY OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT. MOST PERSONS CONTACTED, HOWEVER, FEEL THAT THE RTA COMMANDER, GENERAL KRITI SIVARA, AT LEAST FOR THE AMOMENT WILL SUPPORT SANYA AND WILL KEEP THE REST OF THE RTA GENERALS IN LINE. SOME MILITARY MEN, HOWEVER, VIEW SANYA AS A JURIST AND ACADEMIC UNSKILLED IN PRACTICAL ADMINISTRATION AND THEY FEEL AS A RESULT THAT SANYA'S GOVERNMENT WILL EVENTUALLY BE REPLACED BY A MILITARY GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. CIVIL SERVANTS, WHO BELIEVE THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL BE STRONGLY CIVILIAN ORIENTED, ARE IN STATE OF EUPHORIA APPROACHING LEVEL OF THAT OF THE STUDENTS, BUT NO ONE IS SURE OF THE ROLE THE RTA WILL PLAY IN THE FUTURE. KEY SUBJECT OF GOSSIP IN ALL RTG OFFICES IN THE DISPOSITION OF THE JOBS HELD BY PROTEGES OF THANOM AND PRAPHAT.

3. ROYAL THAI ARMY PERSONNEL REMAIN ON GUARD AT RTG INSTALLATIONS. UNITS WHICH WERE BROUGHT INTO BANGKOK AT THE PEAK OF THE DISTURBANCES REPORTEDLY ARE PREPARING TO RETURN TO THEIR BASES. THERE IS GENERAL FEELING AMONG RTA OFFICERS CONTACTED THAT THE RTA WILL ACCEPT THE CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT AT LEAST FOR THE MOMENT. EMBASSY OFFICER ASKED A RANING BUT RETIRED ROYAL THAI ARMY (RTA) GENERAL WHETHER THE MILITARY WOULD BE CONTENT TO SERVE UNDER A CIVILIAN PRIME MINISTER. THE GENERAL, WHO WAS CLOSE TO THANOM, ANSWERED, "YOU KNOW HOUR HISTORY; THIS SITUATION WILL NOT BE FOR LONG." HIS REMARK IS ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE FEELING OF CERTAIN MILITARY LEADERS, BUT WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT THE ARMY INTENDS ANY DISRUPTIVE MOVES.

4. ROYAL THAI NAVY AND ROYAL THAI MARINE CORPS OFFICERS ARE GENERALLY HAPPY THAT THANOM AND PRAPHAT ARE OUT, THAT QUIET HAS RETURNED TO BANGKOK, AND THAT RTN/RTMC UNITS WERE NOT INVOLVED IN FIRING AT THE STUDENTS. RTN OFFICERS, IN FACT, WERE PLEASED OVER THE ROLE THE RTN REPORTEDLY PLAYED IN CONFIDENTIAL

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SUPPORTING THE STUDENTS (FERRYING STUDENTS ACROSS THE CHAO PHYA, AND FEEDING THE STUDENTS AT THE RTN OFFICERS' MESS). RTN OFFICER FRIENDS OF GENERAL KRITI FEEL THAT THERE WILL BE NO FURTHER TURBULENCE IF KRITI CAN "CONTROL THE SENIOR GENERALS IN THE RTA", ACCORDING TO ONE RANKING NAVY OFFICER.

5. THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY IS GLAD THE CIVIL DISORDER IN BANGKOK IS OVER, BUT BUSINESSMEN TOO ARE RESERVING THEIR

JUDGEMENT ABOUT SANYA AND HIS GOVERNMENT. CHINESE BUSINESS LEADERS WHO HAD ESTABLISHED WORKING FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE FORMER GOVERNMENT ARE NOW CONCERNED OVER THE PROBLEM OF RE-BUILDING THESE TIES.

6. KRIT APPEARS TO ENJOY A HIGH DEGREE OF POPULAR SUPPORT FOR HIS ROLE IN THE CRISIS. A RUMOR IS WIDESPREAD IN BANGKOK THAT KRIT REFUSED TO ORDER THE RTA TO SUPPRESS THE STUDENTS AND CROWDS AFTER THE FIRST VIOLENCE HAD OCCURRED AND THAT THIS REFUSAL CONVINCED THANOM THAT HE MUST ABDICATE POWER AND LEAVE THAILAND. IT IS ALSO WIDELY BELIEVED THAT KRIT, WHO IS REGARDED AS A NON-POLITICAL MILITARY MAN, IS CLOSE TO AND WILL SUPPORT THE KING. SEVERAL THOUGHTFUL THAI MILITARY AND CIVILIAN COMMENTATORS, HOWEVER, SPECULATED THAT IF SANYA'S GOVERNMENT PROVES TO BE OBVIOUSLY INCOMPETENT OR IF AN EVENTUAL ELECTED GOVERNMENT APPEARS TO BE ERRATIC AND JEOPARDIZES THE RTA'S INTERESTS, THAT AN RTA TAKEOVER LED BY KRIT CANNOT BE RULED OUT.

7. THE THAI POLICE (PERHAPS WITHOUT COMPLETE JUSTIFICATION), "ARMY UNITS FROM LOPBURI (SPECIAL FORCES), AND NARONG KITTIKACHORN ARE BEARING THE BRUNT OF POPULAR ANGER OVER THE SHOOTING INCIDENTS ON OCTOBER 14. (A FEW POLICE, HOWEVER, WERE BACK ON THE STREETS ON OCTOBER 16 AND WERE HELPING THE STUDENTS CLEAN UP THE MESS CREATED BY THE DISTURBANCES IN SOME AREAS OF THE CITY.)

8. TO THE STUDENTS AND MAN ON THE STREET, THERE IS A GENERAL FEELING THAT THE LITTLE PEOPLE CHANGED THE GOVERNMENT--FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THAI HISTORY--AND THAT SOMEHOW THINGS WILL NEVER BE THE SAME IN THAILAND'S POLITICS AGAIN.

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